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Management of the Ring-Necked Pheasant

By Fred H. Dale
Branch of Wildlife Research
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

Pheasants have been outstandingly successful in many northern States and now provide the bulk of upland bird shooting over a wide area. As a consequence many landowners are interested in knowing how to encourage pheasants on their farms. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife receives numerous requests for information on sources of birds and eggs for stocking and on methods of propagating this species in captivity.

There are two distinct aspects of pheasant management. One involves the pheasant as a game species, for which land management is the important consideration. The second is concerned with the propagation of birds in pens, for profit or as a hobby, which is an activity more closely allied to poultry husbandry. This leaflet indicates how a management program may be established and gives elementary suggestions on propagation. For those wanting additional information, references for further reading have been included.

The pheasant is successful over a wide range but by no means throughout the United States. Its greatest success is in the more fertile valleys and coastal plains of the East from northern Maryland to southern Maine, States bordering the Great Lakes, midwestern States from northern Missouri and southern Kansas northward, and irrigated valleys of the West. It is not successful in the Southeast and even in the West is seldom abundant south of the 38th parallel, which runs from about San Francisco through southern Colorado.

Revision of Wildlife Leaflet 332 (Jan. 1951) Ringneck Pheasant Management

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Within its range the pheasant is further restricted. It generally is not found in forested areas and never is abundant away from agricultural lands.

Characteristic of the pheasant in America has been its phenomenal success in favorable areas and its almost complete failure where natural conditions are not conducive to survival and production regardless of anything that has been done in the way of management. After many years of extensive trial introductions, it seems reasonable to assume that additional liberations of the American ringneck will not extend its range materially. Introductions of white-winged pheasants from Afghanistan and black-necked pheasants from Iran, whose requirements appear to differ from the American ringneck, may alter this picture somewhat, but at the time of this writing these introductions are still in the experimental stage. Nevertheless, by means of realistic management practices, it may be possible to increase numbers where there already are a few birds.

The soil, itself, and the program followed by the landowner in making a living have profound effects on farm wildlife. Wildlife management must be practiced within the limitations set by the farm plan. The pheasant, like other birds and mammals, is a product of the entire farm program, including, in many cases, developments planned specifically for game.

Highly productive range for the American ringneck is characterized by fertile soils, some basic food crop such as corn, wheat, rice, or soybeans, which is grown in rather great abundance and provides a crop residue for winter food, and an intensive type of agriculture in which a large percentage of the total land area is under cultivation. Hayfields and small grainfields for nesting seem to be common within the best pheasant range. These essential conditions are not created specifically for game and for that reason are not considered as contributions of game management. There are a few additional practical measures that can be taken which may improve the farm environment for pheasants and other wildlife.

During the nesting season, pheasant mortality in hayfields often is a serious problem. Greater speed of mowers and early mowing of hay has stepped up losses in many areas, and no easy or complete solution has been devised. Studies in Iowa and Ohio have shown that losses of hens to the mower can be reduced by about 40 percent through the use of a flushing bar, so in some localities its use might be important. Your State Conservation Department can advise you as to whether it recommends use of a flushing bar in your area and it may be able to provide plans for its construction.

Where cover is limited or lacking a guiding principle is to allow native vegetation to come up on ditchbanks, critical slopes, gullies, woodlot edges, roadsides, and odd corners -- wherever it will not be a liability to the farmer's business. Much good wildlife cover has been destroyed, not for any economic reason, but because of prevailing ideas in regard to "clean" farming. The fencing of woodlots and watercourses will nearly always be constructive measures.

Wildlife cover also can be established by plantings designed specifically to fit into modern farming programs. These include living fences of multiflora rose, hedges, and the planting of shrub "field borders" along edges of woodlands where crops often fail. On the prairies, where blizzards take toll of wintering pheasants, windbreaks help protect crops and buildings, and the birds as well.

Such measures must fit specific types of farming, and the woody plants used must be locally adapted. Few practices will be usable on all areas. Hence, it is well to seek local help. Most State Game Departments can offer technical advice, and many of them will assist both in planning and obtaining materials for cover and food improvements. Technicians in soil conservation districts often can suggest wildlife developments in connection with plans for soil and water conservation.

One of the least profitable game management measures is the release of hand-reared birds to build up wild stocks in regions where the species already is established. If the wildlife habitat is good, there will be plenty of birds for breeding stock, but if food and cover conditions are not right no amount of stocking will be effective. Even in places where pheasants are hunted heavily, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that so long as hens are protected there is little need for adding to wild stock already present.

A relatively new development on the American game-bird scene is the commercial shooting preserve, where hand-reared birds are released in natural coverts ahead of the gunner. These preserves vary according to State regulations, but, in some places, provide shooting where there is but little opportunity for natural bird hunting. Anyone contemplating such a venture should realize that the margin between cost of production and income is narrow, and many of these preserves are not economically successful. Nevertheless, where natural conditions are favorable and efficient management practices are followed, the commercial shooting preserve can be a profitable enterprise.

Individuals interested in propagation of pheasants, whether for profit or as a hobby, should refer to local sources for advice. First of all, the State Game Department will need to be consulted as to State regulations and permits for rearing and selling game birds. Some States have regulations covering the source of stock, and if birds are purchased outside the State it may be necessary to have them inspected before they are brought across State boundaries.

State agencies may also be able to offer sound advice on local pheasant propagation problems. A few States have prepared booklets on rearing game birds in captivity. State game breeders' associations also are good sources of information. The official publication for several game breeders' associations is Modern Game Breeding, published by J. A. Gardy Printing Company, 28 West State Street, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The monthly publication, Game Bird Breeders, Pheasant Fanciers and Agriculturists' Gazette, is available from the Allen Publishing Company, 1328 Allen Park Drive, Salt Lake City, Utah. Names and addresses of

breeders can be obtained from these sources. The Wildlife Management Institute, 709 Wire Building, Washington 5, D.C., and the National Wildlife Federation, 232 Carroll Street, NW, Washington 12, D.C., are good general sources of information on management practices; the Sportsmen's Service Bureau, 250 East 43rd Street, New York 17, New York, distributes information on management of shooting preserves.

Details as to handling breeders and rearing chicks are too complex to be included in a leaflet. These are covered in references on quail and pheasant propagation listed for additional reading.

References

Management

The Farmer and Wildlife (1949), 84 pp., Durward L. Allen, Wildlife Management Institute, 709 Wire Building, Washington 5, D.C. (free)

Pheasants in North America (1956), 490 pp. Edited by Durward L. Allen. Stackpole Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Wildlife Management Institute, Washington, D.C. (Price $7.50)

Wildlife Management through Soil Conservation on Farms in the Northeast (1942), 52 pp., Frank C. Edminster. Farmers Bulletin No. 1868, U.S. Department of Agriculture. (For sale by Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. Price 10 cents)

Propagation

Quail and Pheasant Propagation (1949), 72 pp., Dennis Hart and T. R. Mitchell. Wildlife Management Institute, Washington 5, D.C. (free)

Pheasant Breeding and Care (1959), 108 pp., Jean Delacour. All Pets Books, Inc., Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. (Price $4.00)

Raising Game Birds in Captivity (1949), 224 pp., David B. Greenberg. D. Van Nostrand, New York. (Price $8.50)

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